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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
22 April 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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22 April 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

Peiping flatly rejected the Belgrade appeal in an acid People's Daily editorial of 21 April which condemned its failure to brand the US as the aggressor in Vietnam. Meanwhile, in the Chinese capital, talks continued for the fourth straight day between top DRV and Chinese Communist officials; Peiping described them as "cordial," but has released no details. In Hanoi, the DRV has confirmed that it plans to move some government departments out of town as a precaution against air raids. In South Vietnam, the large force of entrenched Viet Cong 28 miles south of Da Nang air base successfully repulsed an attack by seven government battalions today. The first direct engagement between the Viet Cong and the US Marines was also reported today, nine miles from Da Nang air base.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: An attack today by seven government battalions was successfully repulsed by entrenched Viet Cong units south of Da Nang air base (Paras. 1 and 2). The first direct engagement between US marines and Communist guerrillas was reported today, nine miles from Da Nang air base (Para. 3).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: The US Mission in Saigon reports that increases in the wholesale price of rice are tied, in part, to increasing Viet Cong control over rice production and marketing (Para. 1). Rice taxation is the major source of tax revenue for the Viet Cong, who have improved their taxation techniques considerably (Para. 2). The Communists have, heretofore, not interfered seriously with the economy, but they may be planning to embark upon a campaign to deny resources to government-controlled areas (Para. 3).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: US and South Vietnamese aircraft conducted a number of armed reconnaissance and other missions against lines of communication in the DRV south of the 20th parallel on 22 April. Results were generally good. One Vietnamese aircraft was lost; rescue operations for the pilot are under way (Paras. 1-7). The movement of DRV government offices out of Hanoi, apparently in anticipation of air strikes, has been indicated by the North Vietnamese. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] the pace of civil defense preparations 50X1
there has quickened since the DRV National Assembly meeting (Paras. 8-9).

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V. Communist Political Developments: Peiping flatly rejected the Belgrade appeal on 21 April, charging that it failed to brand the US specifically as the aggressor in Vietnam (Paras. 1-3). Discussions between DRV leaders and high Chinese officials continued into their fourth straight day in Peiping. No details on the talks have been released (Para. 5). In Hanoi, the DRV is putting more emphasis this year on marking the anniversary of Lenin's birth than it has for the past two years; this is another indication of the warming trend in DRV-Soviet relations (Paras. 8-9). In Warsaw, the Sino-US ambassadorial meeting on 21 April found the Chinese representative in an unusually tough mood. He did not broach any new policy initiative at the meeting, and his reluctance to agree to an early date for the next session suggests that the Chinese have no plans at this time to use the Warsaw meetings for any serious proposals. (Para. 13)

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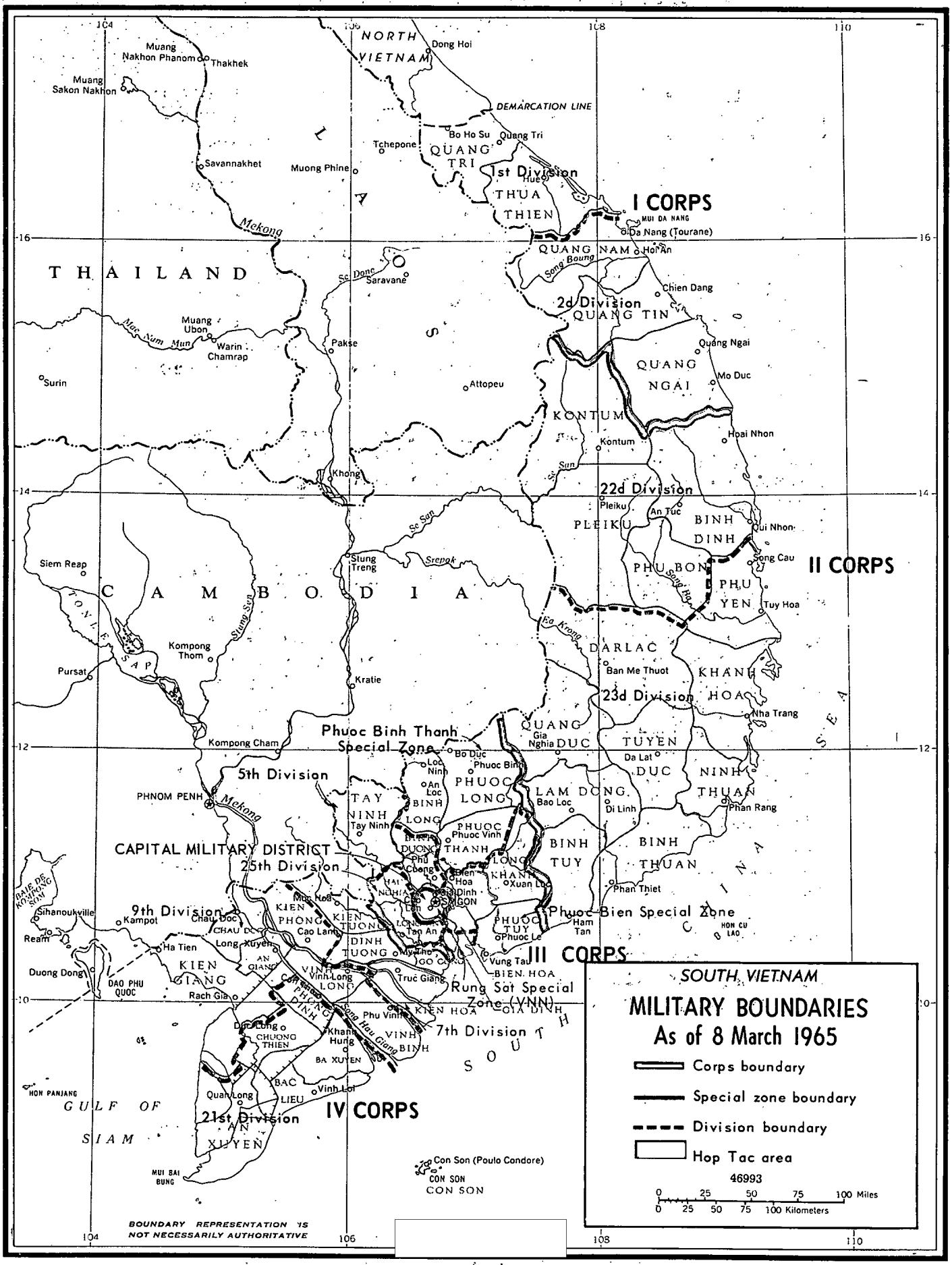

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. According to unconfirmed press reports, South Vietnamese military commanders, under the personal direction of I Corps commander Brigadier General Nguyen Chanh Thi, massed seven battalions of soldiers for an attack on a concentration of an estimated 3,000 Viet Cong near the government outpost of Viet An, 28 miles south of Da Nang air base. However, heavy resistance from the strongly fortified enemy position apparently forced a government withdrawal. The Viet Cong were believed to be equipped with 4.2-inch mortars, possibly those captured from government forces during the battle of An Lao in early December.

2. The latest officially confirmed figures for government losses in the extended fighting which began on 18 April are 41 killed, 48 wounded, and 31 missing. Viet Cong losses by air strikes are officially estimated at 150 killed.

3. MACV has confirmed press reports that US marines fought their first engagement with Communist guerrillas today. The Viet Cong attacked a reconnaissance patrol of 41 marines and 38 South Vietnamese in Binh Thai village, nine miles from Da Nang air base. Enemy small arms fire reportedly pinned down the patrol for 20 to 30 minutes, forcing the dispatch of a reserve company of marine reinforcements to the scene. One marine was slightly wounded, and two collapsed of heat prostration. Viet Cong casualties were not determined. After the brief fire fight, the Communists withdrew and the marines continued the patrol.

4. MACV's military report for 20 April shows 43 Communist-initiated incidents, five of which occurred during the reporting period. No major new actions were reported, as the Viet Cong continued to emphasize small-scale terrorism, hamlet entry and harassment, and harassing fire against government troops, posts, and watchtowers.

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5. The level of government-initiated ground operations of battalion strength or larger reflected a slight increase. Twelve operations were initiated and 11 terminated, leaving 23 in progress on 20 April. No significant contacts were made with enemy units.

6. Small-unit actions conducted on 19 April declined to 2,299. Ten contacts were made with the Viet Cong, none of which produced significant results.

7. Over-all VNAF/USAF activity increased sharply during the reporting period. Pilot reports from combat air operations flown countrywide on 20 April list 16 Viet Cong killed and 202 structures destroyed, 99 in the Quang Tin operation alone.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The US Mission in Saigon reports that the wholesale price of rice has continued to show an upward spiral in South Vietnam. One of the major factors affecting the price of rice is the ability of the Viet Cong to control the production and distribution of rice. To date, South Vietnam's army has been unable, uninterested, or ineffective in dealing with the problem of rice collection and distribution.

2. The US Mission also notes that the Viet Cong exercise control over a significant portion of the rural economy, particulary rice production and trade. The Communists have built up a well-organized and efficient system of revenue collection which is reinforced by terroristic coercion. In addition to taxes on rice production, there are controls on road and commercial river traffic, as well as taxes levied on owners of rubber, tea, and coffee plantations. Assessment standards are apparently becoming increasingly formalized and tax collections are substantial.

3. The ability of the Viet Cong to extract financial support and resources from the local population is extensive. To date the Viet Cong have permitted normal operation of the economy, subject to their taxation. The present rice situation and the recently reported distribution of Viet Cong currency in the delta, however, could signal a change to a strategy of denying resources to government-controlled areas.

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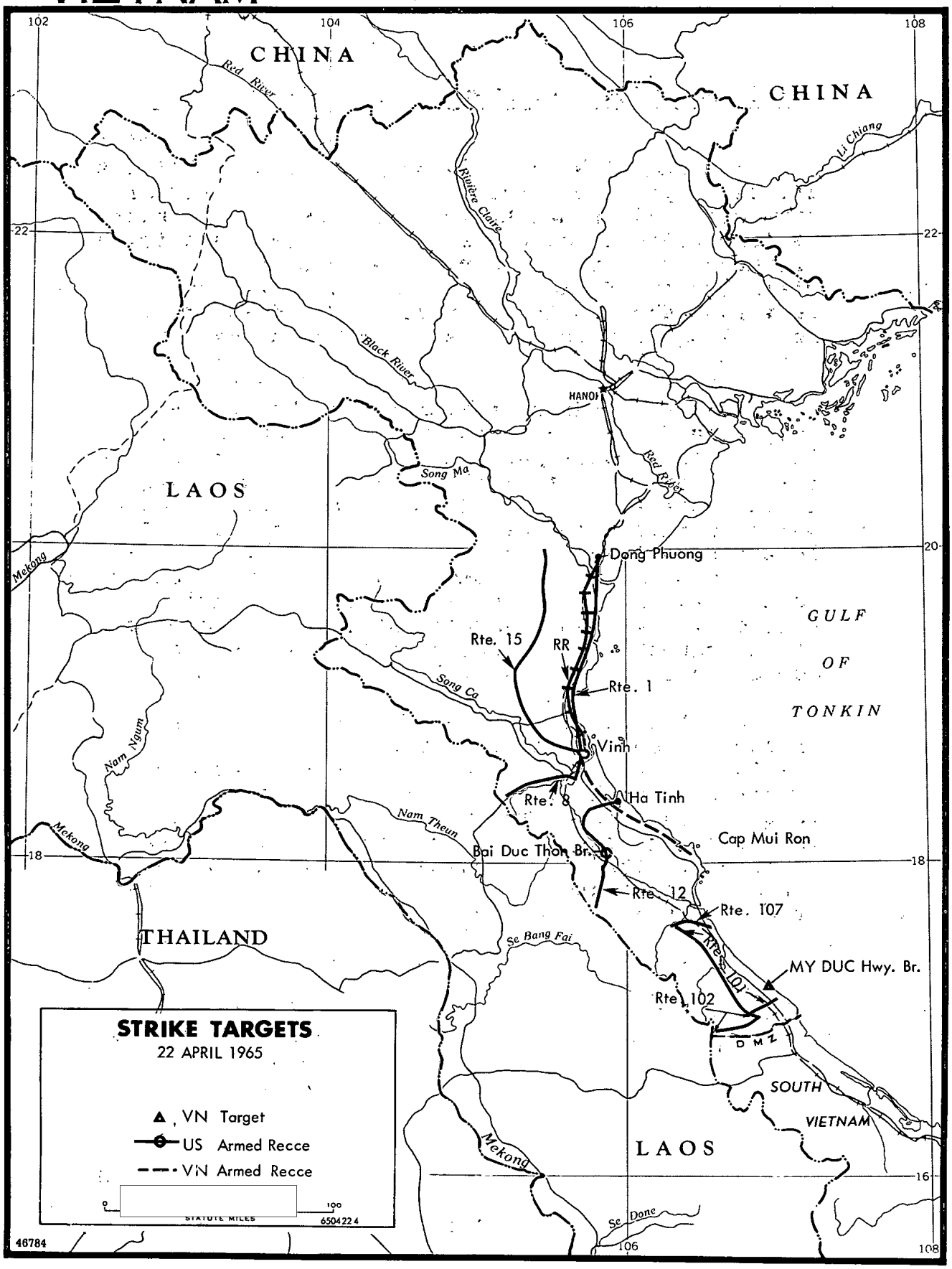
NORTH VIETNAM



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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. US and South Vietnamese aircraft conducted a large number of armed reconnaissance and other missions on 22 April against lines of communication south of the 20th parallel. Results were generally good. One Vietnamese Skyraider was lost and rescue operations are under way for the pilot.

2. A Vietnamese strike succeeded in destroying the three-span My Duc bridge on Route 101. Strike aircraft cut the road (101), attacked several buildings with unknown results, and scored several hits on AAA sites. In addition, several foot bridges were damaged, and several bombs were dropped on a hydroelectric plant at the base of a small dam.

3. US Air Force F-105 fighter-bombers and B-57 medium bombers conducted both day and night armed reconnaissance missions along Routes 8 and 12. The day mission completely destroyed a flak site on Route 8 and severely damaged one large building at the Mu Gia camp. The Bai Duc Thon bridge on Route 12 was also damaged, but no spans were knocked down. The night mission attacked six trucks and five buildings with unknown results.

4. A Vietnamese reconnaissance mission along Route 1A between Vinh and Cap Mui Ron attacked 25 buildings and left five burning and several others damaged. Two small bridges were struck and several junks were strafed with unknown results.

5. US Navy aircraft flew a special mission against six vessels some five miles northeast of Vinh. The vessels had been discovered lying dead in the water by a previous reconnaissance mission. Pilots report attacking four PT boats (probably SWATOW motor gunboats or coastal patrol craft) and two large junks. One gunboat was left burning and a junk was also hit. Pilots report that they apparently caught the vessels by surprise.

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6. Four waves of US Navy aircraft conducted night armed reconnaissance missions along Routes 1 and 15 between Vinh and the 20th parallel. They destroyed an estimated ten trucks and damaged eight. Pilots report that lights in Vinh and other towns in the area were extinguished as the aircraft approached. 50X1

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7. Additional results of night strikes on 21 April indicate that ten trucks were attacked by US Navy aircraft on Route 15. Three were destroyed and four damaged. Strike aircraft reported hearing a survival radio signal in the vicinity where a USS Midway aircraft was lost on 20 April. The chance of the pilot's being alive is considered remote, but a follow-up is being made.

8. 50X1

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North Vietnamese Government offices are now being moved out of the city "in earnest." 50X1

since the closing of the National Assembly meeting on 10 April, the tempo of civil defense preparations in Hanoi has again quickened. There have been no apparent repercussions on public morale, however, 50X1

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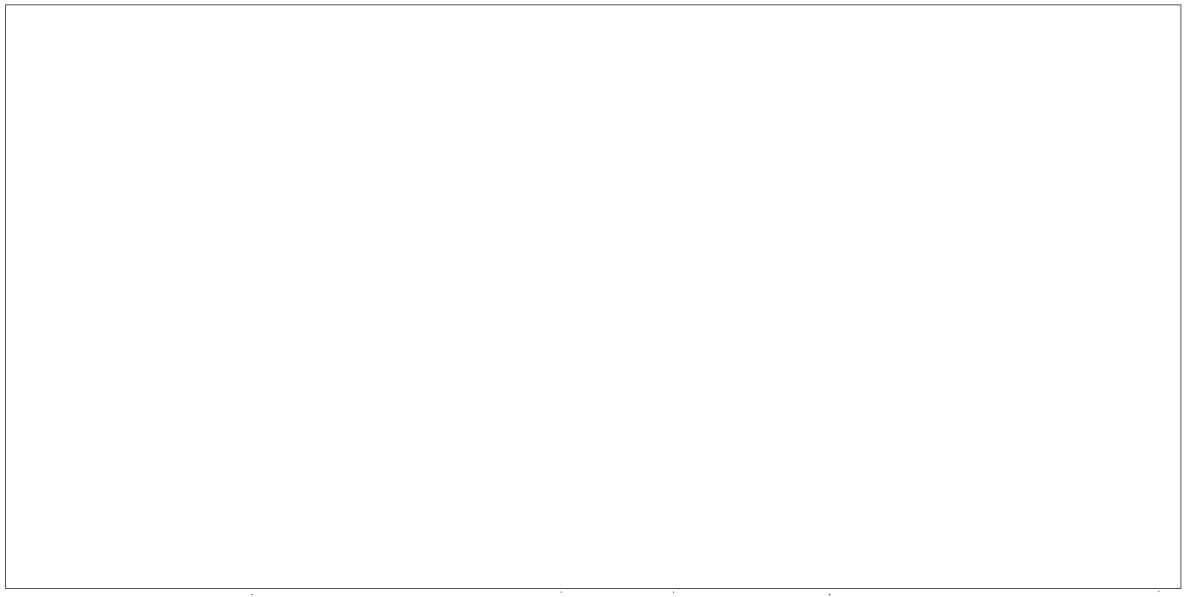

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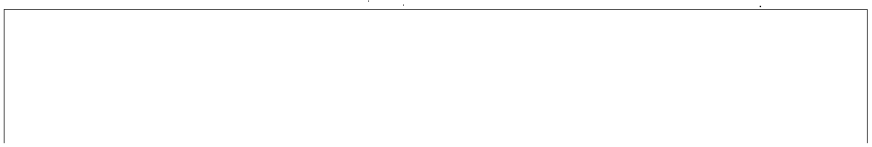

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Chinese flatly rejected the 17-nation nonaligned appeal in an acid People's Daily editorial on 21 April--two days after Hanoi's public response. Peiping denounced the appeal adopted at the Belgrade Conference over a month ago as a "deliberate attempt to absolve US imperialism." Peiping appears most critical of the failure of the nonaligned countries to brand the US specifically as the aggressor. Instead, said the editorial, the appeal attributed the Vietnamese crisis only to a generalized "foreign intervention." As evidence that the appeal "completely caters" to the interests of the US, People's Daily cited favorable statements on it from Washington.

2. The Chinese editorial took pains, however, to absolve some of the nonaligned signatories from responsibility for the document. The editorial patronizingly claims some participants were stampeded into signing through ignorance and that a number have since changed their minds and voiced support for the "patriotic struggle" in Vietnam.

3. The editorial asserts that "The Vietnamese people will never agree to negotiations 'without preconditions,'" and harks back to the 22 March Liberation Front statement's insistence that the Front be a party to any Vietnam negotiations.

4. Chou En-lai reportedly took the same line with Ben Bella during his visit to Algiers last month. According to the Algerian representative at the UN, the Chinese premier was adamant in his insistence that the US deal directly with the Front in any negotiations. Chou reportedly added that anything the Front agreed to the Chinese would be willing to accept.

5. Top-level consultations between Chinese and North Vietnamese leaders are continuing in Peiping. China announced on 22 April that the delegation,

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headed by North Vietnam's party first secretary, Le Duan, had met with all top Chinese party leaders, except Chou En-lai, who is in Indonesia, and Mao, who is believed to be at a resort in Hangchow. The talks were termed "cordial," but the brief press release gave no details.

In addition to such senior hard-liners as Liu Shao-chi and party secretary general Teng Hsiao-ping, the participants have included two military and diplomatic figures who appear to have been closely associated with the Vietnamese in the past, Deputy Foreign Minister Lo Kuei-po and Gen. Yang Cheng-wu. Lo is a former ambassador to Hanoi and may have been a military adviser to the North Vietnamese delegation during the 1954 Geneva conference. Yang, China's deputy chief of staff, has been a key figure in high-level military liaison activity. He accompanied Marshal Yeh Chien-ying on a visit to North Vietnam in 1961 and was present during the Mao-Kosygin meeting two months ago.

6. Chinese coverage of the Honolulu conference continues to rely mainly on excerpts from the Western press selected to underscore the alleged aggressive intent of the US. A Peiping broadcast on 21 April called the conference a planning session for "escalation of the war." Extensive quotations from remarks by Secretary McNamara were used to spell out Chinese claims regarding intended US moves, including the augmentation of US military forces in South Vietnam. Noting that McNamara had "refused" to disclose the number of "military personnel" involved, the Chinese cited Western news service reports that US ground forces would be increased from about 30,000 to 50,000. A commentary in the Peiping Ta Kung Pao on 21 April charged that the US is planning to escalate the war and "even to extend it," but claimed that the more men the US sends in the "more disastrous their defeat."

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8. A North Vietnamese party spokesman, Nguyen Khan Toan, today told a Hanoi meeting marking the anniversary of Lenin's birth that if the Americans continue to expand the war in the South and the attacks against the North, "the Vietnamese people are resolved to fight them until no US aggressor remains in their country." Hanoi radio quoted Toan as saying that the struggle "has entered a difficult period" and that in view of the "grave situation" resulting from the stepped-up war, the North Vietnamese people must "increase their hatred" of the US, boost production, and "fight valiantly to smash the war of destruction they are waging."

9. This meeting, attended by Truong Chinh, chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee and third ranking member of the party politburo, as well as by the Soviet ambassador to Hanoi is another example of Hanoi's recent attempt to put its relations with Moscow back on a more normal footing. Last year Hanoi did not even bother to hold a meeting in honor of Lenin's birth and the articles written in North Vietnamese publications for the occasion attacked "modern revisionism" in an obvious attempt to embarrass the Soviet Union.

10. Soviet officials and propaganda are still stressing that continued US bombings of DRV territory are "imcompatible" with "talk of negotiations." Moscow press commentators cite US news reports that the recent conference of high-level US officials in Honolulu resulted in a decision to step up the war in Vietnam, including the "sending of several US divisions to South Vietnam," and warn that such actions would bring the US closer to the "brink of a very dangerous war."

11. The Soviet ambassador in Copenhagen, in a 20 April conversation with the US ambassador, expressed Soviet concern that the Vietnam crisis might lead to a

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direct US-USSR clash. He declared that Moscow and Washington must find a way to solve the problem before this happens. The Soviet ambassador asserted that the USSR was providing military weapons to North Vietnam, but that he did not know whether they had yet arrived.

12. Ambassador Cabot reports that the Chinese Communist representative at the meeting in Warsaw on 21 April was in a tougher mood than at the last confrontation and took an uncommonly arrogant line. The clearest message from the Chinese side was an affirmation that Peiping will continue to support the war in Vietnam and also expects that the DRV will persevere in the struggle. Chinese Ambassador Wang gave the impression that he actually believed the tide of world opinion was shifting to support Peiping. His reluctant agreement to have the next meeting on 30 June, after the US representative had twice asked for an earlier date, suggests that the Chinese have no plans at this time to use the Warsaw meetings for any serious proposals.

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